

Blaze

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One

As I descended into the light I watched you fade away into a shade of blue and red sparks. They started to cover your eyes, then sprinkled onto your face, shoulders and beyond. I watched you go as I'd always imagined you would. If I closed my eyes now I swear I could feel the ocean beneath my feet. I'd hear cries of laughter far away and listen to fields of barley in the wind.

Don't you dare turning around, it's ok, just keep running. I hear you breathing heavily, soon you'll be totally wasted, but hey, that's fine, I left the shower on, just in case.

Akane awoke in her dark room, startled. The moon was banned behind the clouds which were now racing across the sky, lit by the bright circle far away.

'Geez', she thought, 'there it was again'; her dream she lived through almost every night. A dream that formed more and more into a nightmare. Each night she was exposed to a new fragment of it. Each night her dream continued in some strange way and there was always music, a melody which swung in every scene. Last night she dreamt of the ocean, tonight she ran through a forest, always accompanied by a different melody.

Akane wiped away some beads of sweat which found their way down her neck, giving her an unwelcome shiver down her spine. It was still hot in the room, though both her windows were wide open.

She was just getting up, as she suddenly caught a movement out of the corner of her eye. She felt her blood rushing into her head and stopped halfway, causing her heart to skip a beat. "Who's there?", she whispered, though nothing

happened.

"You're insane, Akane", she told herself, "this dream is driving you nuts". She shook off her worries and stepped forward to close her windows. "Wasn't it supposed to be a starry night?", she mumbled as she peered up to the sky. The moon still hadn't shown itself, only its outline pushed sharply against the grey clouds.

Drugged with sleep she went back to bed, pulled the sheets high up to her cheeks and snuggled down into the big and fluffy blue pillows.

After a short while Akane was fast asleep again, her face...blazing...as the lunar sky finally set to perish and the waxing moon reached its peak.

Two

"Akane!"

No movement.

"Aaakaaaneeeee!"

Still nothing.

"If you don't wake up soon I swear I'll make use of some of your own techniques to kick you out of bed – *including* the bucket full of ice water."

Ranma could see something moving underneath the big pile of blankets.

'Gosh, how can she sleep in this mess', he thought and decided to give it one more try.

"Rise and shine sleepyhead! This is your last call.....I'm warning you...."

He frowned mentally.

"Akane, I *know* you can hear me so get your sweet behind OUT OF THERE!"

Suddenly a ruffled shock of blue hair appeared.

"What did you just say?"

"Haha, I knew this would work, I can't believe I'd actually see the day when Akane Tendo oversleeps."

Akane slowly crawled back under her sheets. "I didn't oversleep, Ranma", he heard her grumble from underneath, "I was just about getting ready...". He didn't catch the last part of what she was mumbling, because the big Akane-pillow pile suddenly started to move awkwardly into all kinds of direction, as if she couldn't find her way out of the bed-cave.

With a heavy sigh Ranma turned around and started to tap impatiently on the floor with his left foot, stopping instantly when he heard a sudden thump

suspiciously close to him.

He looked back at her and rolled his eyes.

"Akane! That's The Wall!"

"Ranma! What the heck are you still doing *in my room??*"

She finally made it through the thick layers of sheets and was constantly rubbing her forehead now.

"Ouch.", she made a face.

Ranma frowned once again and took a step closer towards Akane to inspect any possible damage.

"Are you hurt?", he asked, his voice just a hint softer now.

"No", she winced, "back off."

He shot a gloomy glance at her and moved slightly backwards, as if suddenly he was the one who had to endure her pain.

That changed the second he took his eyes off of her flushed face and started to gaze lower and lower and ... 'Oh, for heaven's sake', as Akane thought....lower.

"Wow", she saw him smirking, "sexy PJ's, tomboy!"

Akane felt her face go blank, as she remembered that she only wore her very antique nightgown, which she found at the back of her wardrobe last night and had little Sailor Moon figures all over it.

'Oh, for cryin' out loud', she thought and it took her a while to recover her voice since her tongue was stuck somewhere between her teeth and her throat.

"Ranma, you IDIOT!", she yelled, "you're well aware that Kasumi has tons of clothes to wash to get rid of the mould, Happosai spread everywhere. And I

REALLY DON'T want to know what you're wearing at night at the moment! NOW GET

YOUR BUTT OUTTA HERE!"

But Ranma had already left the room.

Akane was fuming, not to say blind with rage and she felt the urgent need to smash something hard. NOW.

For a second, she thought about going after that snotty brat but recollected quickly and took a deep breath, when she realized that he would only tease and laugh at her even more, when he saw her running wild in her silly shortie nightie. And she really didn't want to catch him *or* that old leech staring at her legs again. 'Perverts! Why in the world did all men have to be freakin' PERVERTS?!'

To vent her anger only a bit, she threw a pillow at the long closed door.

"Just you wait, Ranma!"

* * *

Dead beat but happy, Akane got back to the Tendo house half an hour later. She did not regret her morning exercise, even though it was her usual day off. But after that turmoil this morning she desperately needed to feel the adrenaline pushing through her veins and the eventual calming effect, which should kick in any minute now.

When she entered her home through the backyard, she immediately took in the smell of freshly brewed tea coming from the kitchen and almost changed her direction. 'No!', she quarrelled, she had to have a shower first before she could give in to her stomach, which longed for food.

As she walked up the stairs, she saw Ranma coming out of the bathroom. He must have heard her footsteps, because he was turning around now to face her. She

noticed the cheeky grin on his face before he could get the words out.

"Akane! There you are! Woah, you smell bad! Better take off your clothes! Quick!"

"Haha, jerk! Is that the best you can come up with?", she returned sarcastically.

Akane watched his eyes rolling around in his head.

"No! I mean it! I left the shower on for you, so you're better not wasting any more precious hot water! Go!"

Slightly irritated, she blinked at him.

'Somehow that sounds familiar, very familiar even...*too* familiar' ... had she missed anything?

"Ok. I'm gonna make it real simple for you, Akane, since you're being a bit slow this morning. One knob in the shower came loose, which means that you can either burn your fingers or shower super-cold when you turn it on yourself. I figured you'd be totally wasted after your workout, so I left the shower on, just in case. Perfect timing, by the way."

And suddenly it hit her.

'FREEZE!!', she thought, 'Was this a *déjà vu*??'

"Ranma...."

"...*What* Did You Just Say???"

Three

'I left the shower on, just in case...' Akane went over that sentence again and again, not making any sense of it at all.

She hadn't given a single thought to her dream from last night... (which was probably due to this very distracting morning).

Until now.

Akane sighed and slid even deeper into the hot damp water.

She refused to take the offered warm shower and drew herself a bath instead, intending to loosen her tension just a little bit.

'Weird', she thought with a crinkle across her forehead, 'What a coincidence.'

At day her dreams usually didn't bother her much, though she could always recall them quite vividly.

"It must be full moon then", Akane whispered.

She thought about past dreams, which always came at that particular time of night.

'I rarely remember any of my dreams', she wondered, 'or at least they fade away rather quickly the next morning'.

Except those at full moon.

Those, in which she could hardly separate dream from reality.

'They always feel so awkwardly real, so authentic...'

Replaying last night, she felt goosebumps crawling up her arms, albeit she was impassively watching the steam of the hot bath clouding her bathroom windows.

Akane immediately snapped out of her thoughts when she heard Kasumi calling for breakfast from downstairs.

For one last time she dove underwater to retrieve the soothing heat that felt so much more pleasant on her skin than this uncomfortable chill.

* * *

When Akane sat down at the breakfast table, Ranma could tell at once that something

was troubling her.

'Maybe she's coming down with a cold', he pondered, when he noticed the ever so pale skin beneath her rosy cheeks.

Instinctively he wanted to place both his hands on their foreheads, comparing their temperature, like his dad always used to do, when he fell sick as a child.

He slightly shook his head in amusement, foreseeing Akanes reactions, when he dared to touch her so.....so quite gently...and in front of everyone too!

Still, he was tempted, but only wondered out loud, if she was feeling unwell, instead.

"Huh?" Akane glanced up and took a look around. Everyone was already there!

She hadn't even noticed that she came last. Maybe because everything was as usual...Nabiki counting her today's income on her fingers, Kasumi refilling Genmas rice bowl once again and her father hiding behind the local newspaper.

"Yes, Akane-chan", intervened her oldest sister, "you do look like you could use a strong chicken bouillon, I'll fix you one in a minute!"

"No, really Kasumi, thank you, but that ain't necessary, it's just the morning sickness."

Everyone, including Mr Tendo, gasped and gawked at Akane in shock.

"WHAT??"

Akane clapped her hand against her forehead. "Gosh! No! Not that way. Oh my...you know when you wake up in the morning and your throat is sore and all, but by noon it's already gone?"

Everyone nodded in unison.

"Well, I've been sort of having that lately, but it's nothing serious, really!"

Everyone stared at her vigilantly.

"REALLY!"

"Akane, you really shouldn't go practicing then!", Kasumi finally spoke again, though having to clear her throat first.

"Well, I wouldn't have, if..."her younger sister mumbled.

"If what?" Ranma now interfered, "Really, Akane, you should have taken a nice hot bath instead!" he smirked.

Akane had to swallow yet another snappy comment.

"Real funny, baka", she choked under her breath.

"Anyway, you can't afford to get sick.", Nabiki's voice suddenly came up, "You two are representing our Dojo at this year's school treat, remember?"

"Is it this weekend already?"

"Yap!"

Oh damn, Akane had totally forgotten about that. And Ranma seemed to feel likewise.

"Crap!" he called out, "and I even got myself a date this Saturday!"

"You got *what?*"

"A date."

Akane eyed him with suspicion.

"Ah, you know, where you meet people and stuff..."

Akane still eyed him with suspicion.

"Duh! Like a date, Akane. D-A-T-E." And after a short pause "Gotta go Tomboy, we're already late" .

He started to get up, but stopped half way to look her straight in the eye "By the way...you jealous?"

"Oh, *Puh-lease!* Don't be ridiculous!"

And they both rushed out the door.

* * *

"You wanna talk about it?" Ranma asked, glancing up to her sideways.

But Akane only shook her head.

They were both on their usual way to school and just started running when they heard the school-bell ringing for the second time. Ranma jumped off the wobbly fence to increase his speed, because he didn't want to be late. Again.

'How are we gonna talk about it in a situation like this?!' Akane angrily thought.

'I mean it's not like I'm gonna tell him anything anyway....although...if he'd ask again

properly...' but Ranma didn't let her finish her thoughts, because he suddenly yanked her out of the way.

She quickly turned her head towards Ranma's face and shot him a startled glance.

"Figured you didn't want to get run over by a herd of excited kindergarten kids going on a field trip..." he said and Akane watched the corners of his mouth slightly curl skywards.

He kept on running, his focus bound forward on the finish, when Akane realized that her feet weren't touching the ground anymore. He was carrying her! With a tight grip around her waist he held her close to him and they were flying down the street and past lots of familiar houses of Nerima, recognizing Dr. Tofu's office in one second and already losing it in the next. She felt that it was going to be another fine day and Akane enjoyed the warm breeze of fresh morning air, blowing lightly against her smiling face. She decided to close her eyes and just let the rush excite her for the moment. While she inhaled deeply the early summer air, she also sensed another very stimulating fragrance.....'Wait a second...is that *Ranma's* fragrance??' Her smile dropped and she opened her eyes again to check, making her eyelids flutter. She tried to move her head even closer to him (which was not too easy at that breakneck speed) and leaned her face just a bit further into the curve of his neck when she felt Ranma stiffen. He came to an abrupt halt and let go of her immediately.

"What on earth are you trying to do, Akane?", he asked, confusion in his eyes and his brows almost touching his nose.

'Damn', Akane grumbled, 'he caught me.'

"Well", she stuttered, "since when are you wearing perfume?"

"What??" he gasped.

'Why does he look so surprised? Isn't it too obvious?'

"Perfume! On your throat! I didn't even know you knew where to buy some!"

Slowly it dawned on him and he sighed.

"That's not perfume" he just said and turned away quickly, continuing his way to school.

Akane caught up with him swiftly, grabbed his arm and turned him around again.

"Then what is that smell?" She guessed that it couldn't be Shampoo's or Ukyo's fragrance since it definitively had a very ... manly edge to it.

But Ranma only loosened her strong grip finger by finger and mumbled something like "That's none of your concern".

He started to turn around once again when Akane suddenly started to burst out laughing. Annoyed and well aware that she probably figured out the truth he stopped half way.

"AHAHAHA!! You're not..." She slung her arms around her waist, holding herself from falling over with laughter.

"AHAHAHA...you mean....you really...ahahaha!! Oh, RANMA!!" And she felt herself being dangerously close to getting down on the ground and starting to roll around, shaking with laughter.

But Ranma's patience was about to run out. He just wanted to get it over with and acquitted himself out of his persistent rigidity.

As soon as Akane realized this she tried to straighten herself again and put her hand on his arm once again.

"Oh Ranma, please forgive me", she said, still chuckling.

She took a deep breath and tried again, now with a pretended stern voice: "But you really mean to tell me that you finally spotted your first hair of beard on your soft babyface?? And you're using aftershave now? Heavens!", Akane couldn't hide another giggle, "When did that all happen??"

And just in that specific second, Akane and Ranma heard the echo of the third stroke of the school gong and they both instantly knew what this meant:

TARDY PENALTY!